(c) whether Government proposes to impart knowledge related to land and agriculture to the farmers so that agriculture land could be saved from turning barren in future; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, the productivity of land has been affected in the intensively cultivated districts of western Uttar Pradesh due to unbalanced use of fertilizers coupled with low addition of organic matter over years.

(c) and (d) The Government of India has implemented an agricultural extension programme to provide training and extension support to the farmers.

The Government is promoting soil test based balanced and judicious use of fertilizers, bio-fertilisers and locally available organic manures to maintain soil health and productivity. A new scheme namely National Project on Management of Soil Health and Fertility (NPMSF) has been introduced during 2008-09 to promote soil test based balanced and judicious use of fertilizers, in conjunction with green manures.

Under the National Project on Organic Farming (NPOF), 25% subsidy is provided for establishment of fruit/vegetable waste compost, vermiculture hatcheries and bio-fertilizer production units.

The State Government has also taken steps for improvement of soil health including green manuring, dhaincha seed production programme, demonstration on vermi compost, distribution of bio-fertiliser packets, distribution of soil Health Cards and distribution of gypsum.

Maharashtra Government's proposal for reimbursement of losses

2273. SHRI SHARAD ANANTRAO JOSHI: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government of Maharashtra has submitted proposals for reimbursement of losses incurred by the State Cooperative Cotton Growers Marketing Federation acting as sub-agent of NAFED; and

(b) if so, the reasons for delay in taking a decision and when Government would be able to settle the issue?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) and (b) NAFED is central nodal agency for procurement of cotton under Minimum Support Price (MSP) in addition to CCI. The Maharashtra State Cooperative Cotton Growers Marketing Federation Limited (MSCCGMFL) is acting as sub agent of NAFED for procurement of cotton in the State of Maharashtra. The Government of India reimburses losses to NAFED incurred on Price Support Scheme (PSS) including cotton. MSCCGMFL is paid actual cost of cotton procured under PSS. Therefore, the question of reimbursement of losses to MSCCGMFL does not arise.

The gross value of cotton procured under PSS in Maharashtra is Rs. 5500.52 cores. As a matter of policy and MOU signed between NAFED and MSCCGMFL, NAFED releases 90% of the value to the procuring agency and remaining 10% is paid after finalization of accounts. Against this, NAFED has already paid Rs. 5097.48 crore to MSCCGMFL.

Alternative cropping strategies

2274. PROF. M.S. SWAMINATHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether contingency plans have been drawn up to promote alternative cropping strategies in monsoon deficit areas and whether seed reserves have been built up to ensure crop security under conditions of aberrant rainfall;

(b) whether compensatory production programmes have been initiated in areas with adequate moisture availability, in order to make good to the extent possible, the loss in production suffered in drought affected areas; and

(c) the steps taken by the National Rainfed Area Authority to promote drought proofing of crops?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) and (b) The Ministry of Agriculture has been constantly monitoring the sowing progress with the states through weekly video conferences/meetings, particularly in the wake of weak monsoon so far to coordinate adequate response. For different scenarios, contingency crop plans for specific agro climatic conditions have been prepared. General features of these plans include replacement of main crop such as rice with alternate crop like millets in case of delayed sowing ; Planning for early maturing varieties of the main crop; Planning for protective irrigation by efficient use of available water; and Promoting Technical Package of Practices like direct sowing, less plant spacing, more seed rate etc. Additional seed quantity of 15 lakh quintals is available to support the contingency crops. Truthfully labeled seeds are allowed to be distributed under Government schemes in the affected areas. Age norms are relaxed for the seed varieties distributed under Government Schemes. In case of delayed planting, additional dose of nutrients are recommended for crops in good rainfall areas which will to some extent compensate the reduction in scarcity areas. It has been advised to take up renovation of existing water harvesting structures in NREGS during July-August so that the likely high rainfall received during September can be stored and used for a pre-sowing irrigation of rabi crops in order to capitalize on good rabi production.

(c) The National Rainfed Area Authority (NRAA) has prepared a vision document "Harnessing Opportunities in Rainfed Areas". The Vision Document will help to guide and provide future direction to harness innovative policies, knowledge, technologies and opportunities for holistic and sustainable development of rainfed areas. The document will help in developing perspective plans for the rainfed areas. The NRAA has also issued common